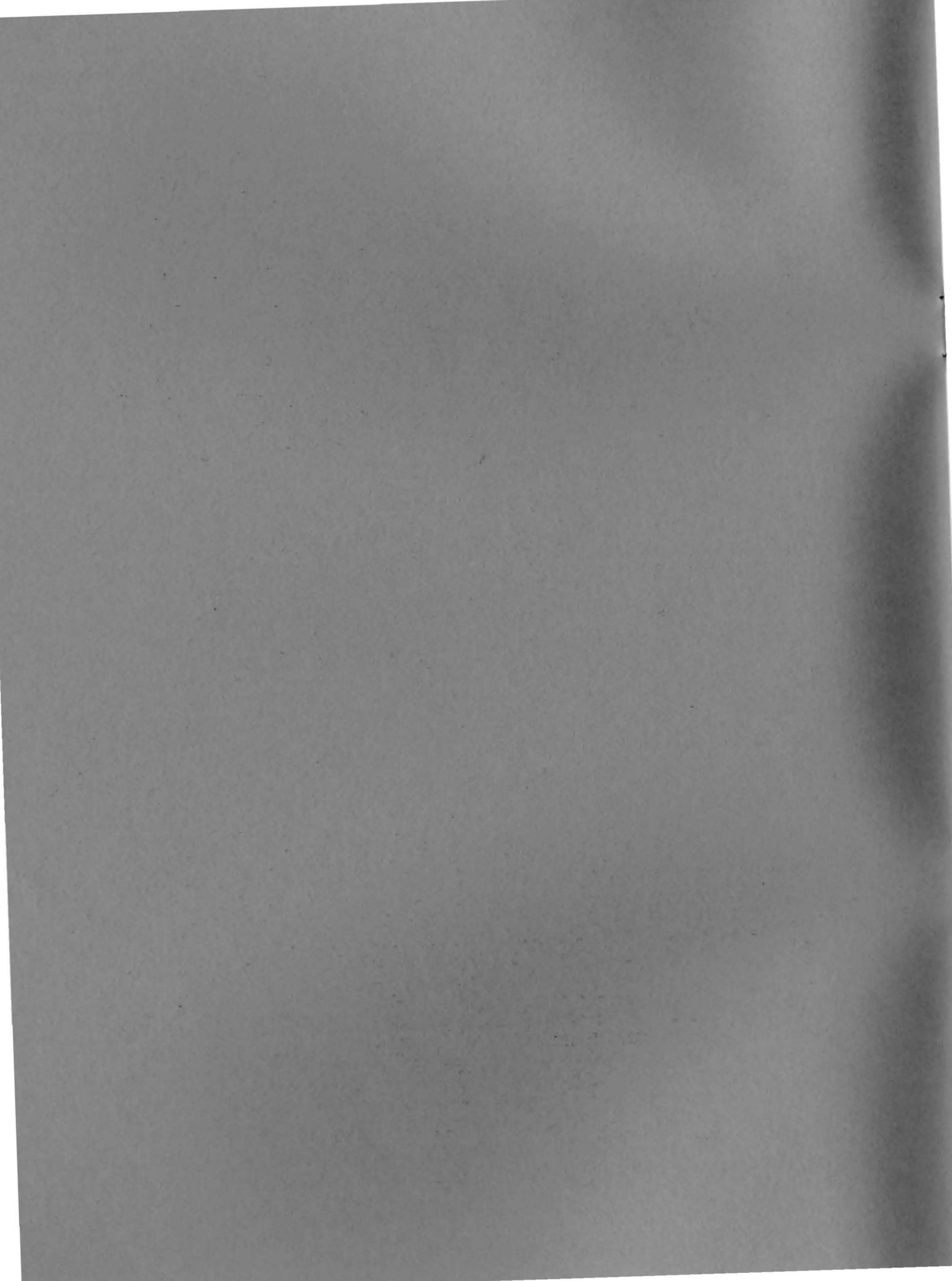


NEW LOWER OFFERING



Patricia Neely

\$2.00  
Fall 1979



# NEW LOWELL OFFERING

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## EDITORIAL

Almost a century and a half ago, the female factory operatives of Lowell put their thoughts, their dreams and their concerns on paper. They offered them for others to see in the *LOWELL OFFERING*. Their work became a page of history.

Today, women have new concerns, reflecting our own times. The Women's Studies Program of the University of Lowell develops this new female experience, building links with past and future. Out of this work has grown the *NEW LOWELL OFFERING*, a magazine edited by women in Lowell.

*NEW LOWELL OFFERING* is published twice yearly, spring and fall. This is the fifth issue of the *NEW LOWELL OFFERING* which includes a diversity of written work and visual arts on women's themes representing not only contributions from the university but also those from the community. Continued success depends on your contributions and support. We welcome your essays, graphics, fiction, poetry, reviews and criticism—work that reflects the lives and thinking of and about women in the Greater Lowell community.

Please send your "offerings," and your subscriptions (see blank inside), to:

### NEW LOWELL OFFERING

University of Lowell  
One University Avenue  
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## Nancy Zaroulis' **Call the Darkness Light** A Review Essay by Martha McGowan

Zaroulis' novel challenges more than a complacent version of New England history<sup>1</sup>. When viewed from the perspective of feminist literary criticism, it raises questions concerning the present situation of fiction written by and about women. I can think of no female writer dealing with the contemporary scene who displays Zaroulis' intense consciousness of the social structure wherein women live and work. Moreover, I know of none who displays Zaroulis' almost compulsive attention to significant detail.

It seems appropriate that this sort of encounter was familiar to female novelists in America and England during this same period. Recently Ellen Moers has labeled the mid-nineteenth century "the epic age" of women's literature in recognition of its achievements.<sup>2</sup> In America, for instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe established a standard in committing herself to the work that produced *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851). The completed novel demanded action in response to its broad indictment of slavery. In particular, Stowe addressed an audience of women whom she called to responsibility for the continuance or abolition of what she saw as a social malignancy.

Of course, Stowe illustrates not only the commitment of female writers during the "epic age," but also their general submergence of women's own concerns in a broad Christian humanitarianism. English female novelists, who wrote the first factory novels, did so not as feminists, but as observers of social injustice that weighed heavily upon both sexes. Most notably, Elizabeth Gaskell, author of *Mary Barton* (1848), described the lives of the factory

people of Manchester during the "hungry forties" to the reading public of her day. Gaskell was aware of new currents of resentment at women's roles; but her awareness did not shake her belief that women were meant to help others instead of attempting to further their own causes. Her commitment to the latter was strictly limited by her ideas concerning the supportive and nurturing functions for which she believed nature intended all women. Gaskell saw the sufferings of women in Manchester, where conditions threatened their traditional functions as wives and mothers of families. But these women were not—at least as she saw it—the special or especially helpless victims of the industrial system.

By contrast, Zaroulis' research into the early mill system in Lowell has brought women's lives and work to the foreground of her novel. Her distance from her subject in time, along with today's widespread discussion of women's roles, has given her also the advantage of a heightened and more focussed perspective. Nevertheless, Zaroulis faced a considerable problem in the long-established, romanticized image of women's work in the Lowell mills. From the mid-nineteenth century, the picture of the farm girls who supplemented their wages with the cultural and social enrichment they found in Lowell has had all the attractiveness that American mythology confers on its Edenic images. Some of the mill girls themselves contributed to the myth of the blooming, energetic young operatives upon whom the Lowell factory system first rested.<sup>3</sup> For a late twentieth-century writer to replace the images of

these predecessors with her own, more powerful, vision required toughmindedness. The effort also required dedication equal in its way to that of Gaskell or Stowe, or other less well-known novelists of that turbulent period.

Zaroulis' excursion into this same past has been personally disillusioning, to judge from the often acerbic tone of her narrative. Her relation to her material as narrator creates unusual and at times obtrusive tensions, revealing the dark force of her anger. The question of whether this distorts her vision comes to seem less imperative, however, as the weight of detail grows and appears as the anger's source. Details of the mill women's working and living conditions provide a graphic portrayal of a system that subordinated their health, safety, and psychological well-being to the operation of machines and the high profit motive. Significantly, the first mill woman to appear in the novel is a dissident. Her voice hoarse, she addresses a crowd in a mill yard; then corporation guards drag her away, thus restoring order and the silence of discontent that other women will break at their own peril. The need to send money home, to support a brother in college, or to increase a woman's marriageability created dread of the blacklist circulated among the mill bosses. Unhappy women risked this only under the extreme pressures of circumstances that produced equally desperate recklessness.

Eventually the dissidents organized for reform in the mills. Sabra Palfrey, Zaroulis' protagonist, never joins these women; yet her experience in Lowell makes her despair to the point of attempting suicide in hopes of escaping the brick city. Even in so doing, Sabra is never simply a mill girl, nor merely representative of their problems. Zaroulis moves her among the other classes of women in Lowell from the 1840s on through the early Civil War period. In the process, Sabra becomes a figure symbolizing the restrictions upon all classes of women here at mid-century. Like other women, she seeks to nurture and support those whom she loves, but finds her attempts thwarted and dreams ruined by a hostile environment. On the brink of adulthood, as she sets out for Lowell, Sabra dreams of a young woman, herself, who

moves freely through the world by her own efforts. She sees Lowell at first as a way station to such freedom. Then as her knowledge grows, Lowell presents to her, instead, a spectrum of female circumstances in which only the bonds differ. She can observe that the iron will of wealthy Josiah Bradshaw's daughter makes its effects felt. But it also separates Rachel Bradshaw from family, sexual love, and community. Bradshaw's wife, who acquiesces to one more, fatal attempt to secure a male heir, represents a more pathetic, because more hopeless, slavery. Her drugged stupor carries her, uncomplaining, uncomprehending, to the death she has embraced willingly.

Far from such privilege, the mill women appear justly proud of the independence and decency they secure by their own labors. There exists among them some consciousness of advancing as pioneers into a new world wherein women working for just wages will form at last a true sisterhood. Yet "work or die" is the motto that they realize applies to their present lot. Moreover, beyond the well-guarded enclosures of their lives are immigrant Irishwomen who struggle to survive in bare hovels. The immigrants threaten to slow the firm march toward a bright future. They pose a problem of social caste that their racial and religious differences from the Yankee farm girls exacerbate.

Sabra Palfrey's sojourn in the Acre, the immigrants' district, makes her aware of the Irishwomen's lives and of a truth they already know. Between the mills and the Acre there is no real middle ground for the woman on her own: even an American woman, as Sabra is. Survival by any means is the harsh rule by which she and all those beyond the mill owners' "protection" must fight to live. Observing Sabra, one of the Irishwomen thinks that there is no mercy anywhere in this new world. Sabra receives not even this much pitying notice from others encountered on her way through her increasingly bitter experience.

Most notably, she meets several individuals whose entire mission in life is purportedly the advance of humanity. Their various causes fail to make them more human or compassionate than a mill agent like Bradshaw, who befriends the young Sabra at least briefly. In fact, Zaroulis

makes Sabra's experiences with Utopian reformers even more painful, on a psychological level, than her time in the mills or her brutal scramble for life in the Acre. Ineffectual, ironically-named Silas Blood fathers Sabra's child through misapplication of theories on human population: more specifically, Robert Dale Owens' instructions for performing the sex act. When Sabra can no longer devote herself wholly to him, Silas' work for an egalitarian community causes him to regard her as only an obstacle.

Zaroulis depicts the lives of other women in male-dominated, "ideal" communities as similarly illustrating the real paradox. The cause of suffering humanity permits the Utopians' neglect of the vividly human needs that their women hardly dare voice to them. Under these circumstances, sexuality itself is regarded often as a burden or mere temptation to weak principles. Some of the Utopians would reject sexuality, as have the Shakers, among whom Sabra lives for a brief time in a rural, outwardly idyllic setting. To her horror, she witnesses here the potential for disaster of their strict rules meant to suppress sexuality. Returning to Lowell, without a husband or friend, she is all the more ready to submerge herself in her affair with John Prince, an Englishman come here to advance his cause, that of organized labor. From the start his involvement with Sabra is almost entirely exploitative. More forceful than Silas, he is also a more threatening figure, since he detests actively all forms of female self-assertiveness. Sarah Bagley, the only actual historic figure named in the novel, appears to Prince as his rival in their efforts at organizing the mill women. She would receive Prince's reward—sexual humiliation—if he saw a way clear to administer it. Unfortunately for Sabra, he cannot recall any woman he has enjoyed so much as he does her. Thus his departure from Lowell leaves Sabra without resources, pregnant, not far from the crisis during which she tries to end her life and that of her small daughter.

Native-born, Sabra Palfrey has been burdened like a small horse by those, including Prince, who could use her. Plainly, Sabra's story is an answer to the neglect of women's issues by female writers like Stowe

or Gaskell in the last century. The very ordinariness of Sabra as protagonist makes her more effective than a more glamorous heroine could have been. As Zaroulis makes clear, the choice of Sabra as heroine involved initial decisions concerning the function and resources of fiction. More generally, the futility of romantic conventions appears repeatedly as a theme throughout the narrative. While being cast out of Josiah Bradshaw's private world, Sabra compares her life story to this point with that of a heroine in a romance she has just read. For Sabra it does not provide the escape it affords the leisured Bradshaw women, to whom such fare is familiar.

Yet the mill girls enjoy similar reading, as Sabra learns later. Aspiring writers among them—writers for the first *Lowell Offering*—deliberately use or cannot see past the stale conventions of romantic fiction. Minerva Swan, Zaroulis' representative of these writers, furnishes an important perspective from which romantic fiction appears as the female writer's most crucial issue: Minerva's first romances for the *Offering* have the conventional ending: the marriage of the factory-girl heroine, who bears little resemblance to the real women among whom Minerva lives. As the mill owners use such romances for their own purposes, Minerva perceives more and more steadily that sober fact is indispensable. Her belief that someone should record the actual experience of the Lowell women, in whom she glimpses a new phenomenon, first drives her beyond the *Lowell Offering*. Her contempt for the illusions of visitors to the city, like Charles Dickens, prompts her to develop her own fast-held aesthetic.

Minerva refuses to write a death scene for a heroine not conforming to a woman's proper role: as the young writer's contemporaries, including her new publisher, view it. With her publisher's reluctant consent, she wins a significant battle by showing a female protagonist who suffers acutely but goes on living, and without the protective authority of a husband. "All suffering and gloom and then in spite of everything she lives," a boardinghouse owner in Lowell comments, finding Minerva's published novel—not a romance—"disgraceful."

Zaroulis refrains similarly from providing

the romance that the genre of the historical novel, commercial considerations, or even personal attachment to place might have swayed her to accommodate. Sabra Palfrey comes close to happiness and the ideal of female fulfillment more than once, but fails to attain them within the time-span of the narrative. In spite of everything she lives; yet at the conclusion her future remains unclear, having no more prospect of real freedom than Zaroulis has shown other women to possess during the period.

Epic in scope, Zaroulis' achievement makes us ask where are the contemporary novels by women that might measure the extent to which women have now achieved their freedom to move through the world

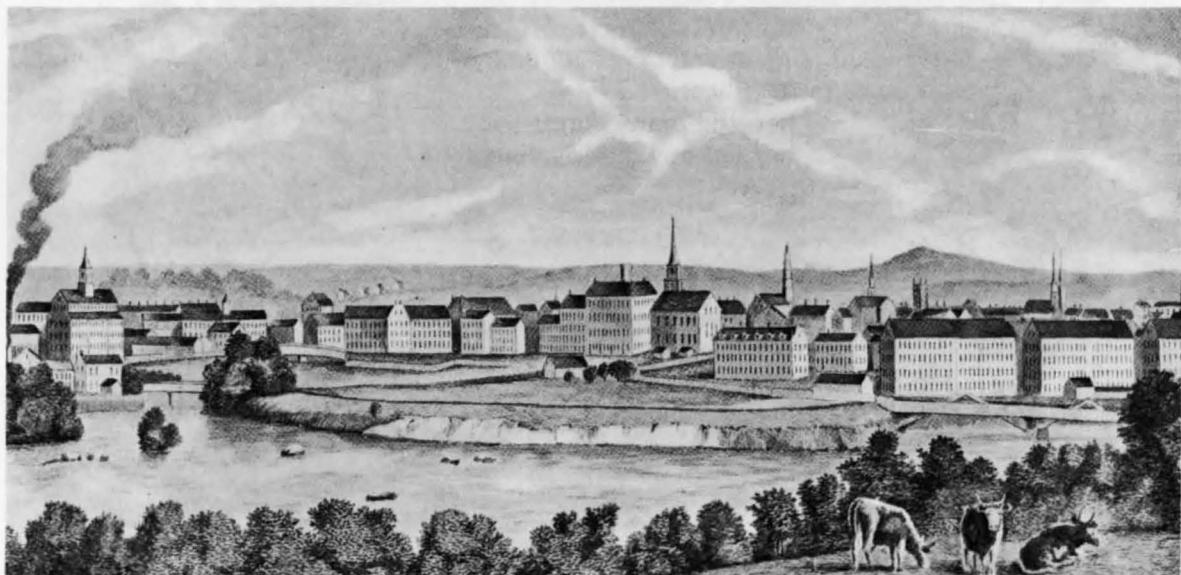
by their own efforts. Where are the writers who can see past the new myths and outworn conventions to present a true image of our present realities? We need novelists that speak of women's lives today with force and diligent attention to meaningful detail. Having returned from her sojourn in the Lowell past, perhaps Nancy Zaroulis may go on to write them.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>New York: Doubleday, 1979.

<sup>2</sup>See *Literary Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 19-62.

<sup>3</sup>See especially Harriet H. Robinson, *Loom and Spindle: or Life Among the Early Mill Girls* (rpt., Kailua, Hawaii: Press Pacifica, 1976).



Birdseye View of Lowell—1838

courtesy of Lowell Historical Society

**MEETING PUSHANAM**  
**(Sweeper)**  
**by Eva Apfelbaum**

She saw me,  
I saw her,  
She forever  
Lightly sweeping,  
I forever gently seeking,  
Her, the many forms of her.  
We two alone  
Along the long arch spaced veranda  
Strolled barefooted, above tree tops,  
Each toward the other.  
We smiled,  
Embraced,  
Both speechless,  
Not sharing a common tongue.  
She, her little graceful form  
Forever sweeping  
With bending tufts  
Of noiseless grass.  
I forever weeping  
So deeply stirred  
By her, the many forms  
Of her unknowing loveliness.

# LOWELL OFFERING



*"Is Saul also among the prophets?"*

A REPOSITORY  
OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES, WRITTEN BY  
"FACTORY GIRLS."

LOWELL: MISSES CURTIS & FARLEY.  
BOSTON: JORDAN & WILEY, 121  
Washington street.

# *Yesterday*

## **THE SPIRIT OF DISCONTENT**

"I will not stay in Lowell any longer; I am determined to give my notice this very day," said Ellen Collins, as the earliest bell was tolling to remind us of the hour for labor.

"Why, what is the matter, Ellen? It seems to me you have dreamed out a new idea! Where do you think of going? and what for?"

"I am going home, where I shall not be obliged to rise so early in the morning, nor be dragged about by the ringing of a bell, nor confined in a close noisy room from morning til night. I will not stay here; I am determined to go home in a fortnight."

Such was our brief morning's conversation.

In the evening, as I sat alone, reading, my companions having gone out to public lectures or social meetings, Ellen entered. I saw that she still wore the same gloomy expression of countenance, which had been manifested in the morning; and I was disposed to remove from her mind the evil influence, by a plain common-sense conversation.

"And so, Ellen," said I, "you think it unpleasant to rise so early in the morning, and be confined in the noisy mill so many hours during the day. And I think so too. All this, and much more, is very annoying, no doubt. But we must not forget that there are advantages, as well as disadvantages,

in this employment, as in every other. If we expect to find all sun-shine and flowers in any station in life, we shall most surely be disappointed. We are very busily engaged during the day; but then we have the evening to ourselves, with no one to dictate to or control us. I have frequently heard you say, that you would not be confined to house-hold duties, and that you disliked the millinery business altogether, because you could not have your evenings, for leisure. You know that in Lowell we have schools, lectures, and meetings of every description, for moral and intellectual improvement."

"All that is very true," replied Ellen, "but if we were to attend every public institution, and every evening school which offers itself for our improvement, we might spend every farthing of our earnings, and even more. Then if sickness should overtake us, what are the probable consequences? Here we are, far from kindred and home; and if we have an empty purse, we shall be destitute of *friends* also."

"I do not think so, Ellen. I believe there is no place where there are so many advantages within the reach of the laboring class of people, as exist here; where there is so much equality, so few aristocratic distinctions, and such good fellowship, as may be found in this community. A person has only to be honest, industrious, and moral, to

secure the respect of the virtuous and good, though he may not be worth a dollar; while on the other hand, an immoral person, though he should possess wealth, is not respected."

"As to the morality of the place," returned Ellen, "I have no fault to find. I object to the constant hurry of every thing. We cannot have time to eat, drink or sleep; we have only thirty minutes, or at most three quarters of an hour, allowed us, to go from our work, partake of our food, and return to the noisy clatter of machinery. Up before day, at the clang of the bell—and out of the mill by the clang of the bell—into the mill, and at work, in obedience to that ding dong of a bell— just as though we were so many living machines. I will give my notice to-morrow: go, I will—I won't stay here and be a white slave."

"Ellen," said I, "do you remember what is said of the bee, that it gathers honey even in a poisonous flower? May we not, in like manner, if our hearts are rightly attuned, find many pleasures connected with our employment? Why is it, then, that you so obstinately look altogether on the dark side of a factory life? I think you thought differently while you were at home, on a visit last summer—for you were glad to come back to the mill, in less than four weeks. Tell me, now—why were you so glad to return to the ringing of the bell, the clatter of the machinery, the early rising, the half-hour dinner, and so on?"

I saw that my discontented friend was not in a humor to give me an answer—and I therefore went on with my talk.

"You are fully aware, Ellen, that a coun-

try life does not exclude people from labor—to say nothing of the inferior privileges of attending public worship—that people have often to go a distance to meeting of any kind—that books cannot be so easily obtained as they can here—that you cannot always have just such society as you wish—that you"—

She interrupted me, by saying, "We have no bell, with its everlasting ding-dong."

"What difference does it make," said I, "whether you shall be awaked by a bell, or the noisy bustle of a farm-house? For, you know, farmers are generally up as early in the morning as we are obliged to rise."

"But then," said Ellen, "country people have none of the clattering of machinery constantly dinning in their ears."

"True," I replied, "but they have what is worse—and that is, a dull, lifeless silence all around them. The hens may cackle sometimes, and the geese gabble, and the pigs squeal"—

Ellen's hearty laugh interrupted my description—and presently we proceeded, very pleasantly, to compare a country life with a factory life in Lowell. Her scowl of discontent had departed, and she was prepared to consider the subject candidly. We agreed, that since we must work for a living, the mill, all things considered, is the most pleasant, and best calculated to promote our welfare; that we will work diligently during the hours of labor; improve our leisure to the best advantage, in the cultivation of the mind,—hoping thereby not only to increase our own pleasure, but also to add to the happiness of those around us.

ALMIRA.  
LOWELL OFFERING, July 1841

## URBAN RENEWAL

by Charles A. Gargiulo

I am my Aunt Rose.

Peeking out over the greyness of an Austin Street tenement,  
unable to climb down the stairs to a world that has forty years  
of changing behind me.

Multi-colored, jewel-like, rosary beads ornament my bedposts,  
waiting to be clutched and caressed by my bony fingers.

I lay crippled and wasted, praying to my Lady of Lourdes statuette  
for a cure from the pain of a world gone by.

Seasons change but the temperature remains the same in my apartment,  
where the scenes from my second floor window play like a TV set,  
except the window doesn't offer reruns.

Once a moment has passed it becomes lost forever,  
and so I fear, will be my life.



# RECOLLECTIONS OF A FACTORY OPERATIVE

1938

*Traditionally, records of history were written and passed on from one generation to the next. Today, modern technology has introduced changes in methods of gathering history. One very common method is to tape record interviews which are called "oral histories."*

*The following is a portion of an oral history from the University of Lowell Special Collections Oral History Program. In this transcription, a French-Canadian woman recounts her experiences in the Lowell textile mills during the 1930's.*

L—Interviewer  
H—Subject

H: I worked at the Merrimack. I went into the weave room where they were gonna teach me. In them days they called us "battery girls." The weave room had big wide machines, and they had great big reels at the end of it, and they put the bobbins in there. And you'd thread it on the side. But they don't call them "battery girls" no more. What was it that Mommy used to do Colleen, do you remember, in the Wannalancit? Oh it will come back to me. They were una-fill girls. Later on when I went into Wannalancit, they asked me what I used to do and I said "Oh, I was a battery girl," and they looked at me and laughed. I was giving away my age. He said they ain't called battery girls any more. I said, "What are they called?" and he said, "They're called una-fill girls" and I said so what.

L: So why did you only stay one day?

H: It was terrible. You've never been into a weave room.

L: No.

H: It was the noisiest room you could ever be in. There's machines going and shuttles going back and forth, back and forth, and sometimes they'd fly off and they were pointed things and if they ever hit you, boy, you'd know it. Those flying shuttles, they're dangerous. In fact, my friend got struck by one in the leg. Then the thing in between, with all the wires hanging off. It pushes the thread up and the thread goes in and pushes it back, it keeps plopping back and forth. It's very, very noisy. In fact, the whole place vibrates. When I come out of there at night I was shaking; I was still in the mill. It's a place you have to get used to... it's the noisiest place in the whole mill, in fact. So then I told my father I didn't like it and he said, "Well you weren't getting paid for it anyways, you were just in there to learn to see if you liked it." I didn't get paid for the whole day's work, they were just teaching me.

L: Did you have to go through sort of an apprenticeship?

H: Oh yes, an apprenticeship. I didn't like that too much. So then they put me up in the finishing room where I worked for Peter. He was an old man then and he had both of his legs cut off. He had sugar diabetes and they cut both of his legs off, and he was in a wheelchair but he was still the boss there. And that's where those machines were, one by one. Then they started putting two together, then three together. They were doubling up all the machines so it made that much more work and less help to go by.

L: What did you do in that room?

H: In that room I used to run those silent pegs, they called them. They'd put a load of velvet, which was all cut by then in the back, and a big iron wheel would run it through the pegs. They had these great big reels that used to run the velvet through them. You'd have to thread the cloth in through the back. They'd go through these pegs and be hit by another piece of iron. With the one machine, sometimes you'd have to run them two or three times, but with the three machines together I'd only have to do it once. It saved a lot of time. Sometimes it'd have to go through six times, then it'd go to a brush machine, then to a folder. I'd run them folders; all you'd do is sit back and let it fold back and forth. There we got thirteen dollars a week. No matter who you are or where you were in the mill, you got thirteen dollars a week. You might as well have taken a deck of cards and passed it out. You didn't really need the names 'cause everybody got thirteen dollars a week.

L: So no matter what you did you got the same money?

H: Yes, no matter what you did. The one with the easiest job and with the hardest job got the same money as the rest of them.

L: And no one ever complained?

H: Wouldn't do you any good; they'd never complain. They were so petrified for their jobs in them days, it was pitiful.

L: Why were they scared?

H: Because if you were a good worker, in with the boss, it was o.k. But the others,

the least little thing and those snoopers would snoop on you and would tell the boss and you'd be out. They talk about patronage these days. It was nothing like it in the mill. That's what finally drove the Merrimack out of business — it had too much patronage. Neither color, creed or nationality, or anything else. Your creed...I remember the boss saying, if you were Catholic you would never work in the office of the Merrimack. So therefore, in the long run, year by year, people started getting a little smarter and started talking about forming a union. You know Louis?

L: A little bit.

H: Well Louis's the one who started the union in the Merrimack. He sent out this pamphlet that said to come to a meeting 'cause we were going to start a union...

L: And in what year was this?

H: Well, you got me by the year.

L: Go on.

H: It was a long time ago. Buddy was small then. I was on the committee then. It was 1938. They were passing out pamphlets. I still have one. I had my name in one of them because I was one of the agitators. My son should keep this.

L: You were handing out pamphlets...

H: Yes, and they were going to have this meeting and they all kept talking about it. All the girls kept saying, are you going, are you going and I said "of course not". I asked my girlfriend, "Are you gonna go?" and she said, "I'll go if you go," and I said, "You won't go, 'cause you're chicken." She said, "All right we're going, we're going right after work tonight." And we went and that's where I got implicated.

L: In what way?

H: Shooting my big mouth off. Telling them all different things. How the bosses were unfair to the help, which they were, and how there was one clique which could do anything they wanted and it didn't matter. Let the other poor fools do anything, they'd be bounced right out. And if anybody died in your immediate family, they'd (the clique) take up a collection. Thank God, no one in my family did but I had friends; one close friend whose mother

died. It was on Mother's Day and I wanted to pick up a collection but nobody could be bothered. Then one of the girls in the clique, Alice, well she had a sister down in Florida and her husband died. Immediately they started taking up a collection and everyone had to give for poor Alice's sister's husband! Well that's when I blew my stack. If there's no collection for Alice or anybody else, well I told them about the staff and I told Louis all about it. And he said "Why don't you come on the committee?" and I said, "No, I couldn't do that." But they persuaded me and I ended up becoming steward. I didn't set out to become Mill Steward. But if you don't think I didn't catch it then. Well, they were gonna throw me in the canal and everything else. Well the boss started getting real cocky. At night we went to ring out our cards and there was the little clique ahead of time, so they'd run and punch theirs first. And they'd walk out. If any of us did it, the boss would come down and say "get back to work, you work until 5 of" and no one would ever say that it was after 5 or they'd get bounced. They tried to bounce me a couple of times but my father had worked there for so long and he was the one who had gotten me the job. I remember one day Peter came by and piled a whole load of velvet in back of me. Well I didn't have any work and I was waiting for the boys to come and bring me some. So he comes around and says, "Why didn't you do that work in the back?" and I said, "Cause it wasn't there!" and he said, "You liar, it was so there!" Well I was a cocky little bugger then and I jumped up and said, "Don't call me a liar. You just now put that there and I'm sitting here watching you do it. Don't you dare call me a liar or I'll bat you on the side of the head, you dirty Englishman." He took off then and I hollered, not so loud anymore, after him, "And you know what you can do with your job!" Well I walked down to the dressing room. It was a room with hooks in it where the girls used to hang their coats and there was a curtain across the front of it. The men



circa 1910

*Courtesy of Westford Public Library*

had one on the other side. So I put on my hat and coat. I knew I was gonna get killed by my father when I got home, first of all for jacking up. I was going out the door and he said, "Don't be so hasty, don't be so hasty, get back to work." "No I won't," I said. Just then my father comes walking through and he says, "Joe, where'd you get that spitfire? She has more darn nerve than anybody." I said, "He just called me a liar and I'm not a liar." My father said, "Get back to work, get back to work." I said "I'm not going back to work for him." I had to get back to work because my father told me to. Then Peter says, "You started it, you started it," so he comes in and starts to push things here and there. He wanted to get in good with me then. Anyways there were these windows in the Merrimack that were close to the floor and opened out. He says push me down the room\* and I said "I'll push you down the room, I've a good mind to push you out the window!" "Get out of here, get out of here, leave me alone!" he said. He never asked me to push him again.

L: Go on.

H: Now let's see...after that I worked in the clothroom. That was a better job. But there was more patronism in there than in the other place. And they favored the English you know; and your bosses and supers and higher-ups were English. And if you were anything else they looked at you like you were dirt. You were dirt that's all.

L: Was it a promotion to go into the clothroom?

H: No, I was still getting the \$13 a week.

L: Then why did you go in there? Was it a better job?

H: Yes. Well at that time there wasn't too much work in the finishing room and rather than lay me off, (through my father, not because I was a good worker, because they didn't like me that much), they put me in the clothroom. And I stayed there for a few years. I stayed there for a couple of years. I got married in the finishing room then moved up to the clothroom. That's where we started the union in the clothroom. That's when my father

disowned me. He said, "I never thought I'd see my daughter standing at the gate, talking to a union leader." He almost killed me. But he wouldn't join. He had been there too long and I told him that he was afraid for his job. But they got him out anyways; he was getting older and they were replacing everybody with younger men.

L: What was your job as steward in the union?

H: I had to take their complaints, and everyone had complaints—the least little thing. Of course it was a new union and we had never been in a union before. Well this guy from the Labor Board in Boston came down. He wanted to ask some of the girls questions, one by one in the office. I guess it was all right, but I said, "No you don't—I'm gonna be in there too." He said, "No you aren't, this isn't any of your business. I'm head of the Labor Board and this has nothing to do with your union." So I stayed out and I called Louis. I said, "He's in there questioning all the girls and he won't let me in." He laughed and he said, "That's o.k., you'll meet him after work; come up because we're going to have a meeting up here." And he was there. He said, "So this is the little one that wanted to come in." And I said, "Yes, but you wouldn't let me." He said, "Listen, learn to crawl before you learn to walk." I got that but that was o.k. Then things started to get so bad that McKay had to hire a personnel manager. So they couldn't control them. Well, Whittier was my boss then—Rigby had died and Whittier was made boss. And they were going in the clique again, running to punch their cards and he came down one night and I was first at the clock. He says "It's not 5 of yet," and I says, "Yes it is, the green light's on." "You're not supposed to have your hat and coat on yet." And I said, "That's because I'm a little faster than them, so I have them on." He says, "You're supposed to be at your bench." "Wait a minute, Whittier," I says. "Whenever anybody else is in line it's all stiff and grins. They can punch any time they want to. Nobody says anything to them. You don't say

\*Peter was in a wheelchair.

anything to them. You're not going to make flesh of one and fish of another. The way this place has been run all their lives, well you're not going to do it no more."

So the help got cocky, we all got cocky. In fact, they're not going to push it down our throats like before. They got their rights. They knew what they could do and what they couldn't do. They weren't going to infringe on their rights. They'd come over to me and say, "Hey, look what they're trying to make me do." And boy, the fellas, they were worse. They'd push me on. They agitated me more than anybody. They'd come down and say, "Hey, they done this to me." So of course I'd have to go into the office and squawk. We talked it over and then the floor lady, Mrs. Smith, she was English too...she was a snip if there ever was one. And she was always trying to rub it in to one girl or the other so finally I got her in the office one day with Belle (he was super then), and he starts to talking about what the girls were doing. And I says, "It's no more than right the other girls are doing it, Mr. Belle, why can't she do it," I said. And Mrs. Smith says to me, "Well, you're a very good talker but things aren't right. They haven't been right since the union started." "And remember," I says, "if it wasn't for you, and people like you, and the likes of you, there never would have been a union in this place. But it was the likes of you that brought the unions in," I says. "If there wasn't so much par-

tiality for one to another," I says. And that's the whole thing in a nutshell. One day, I don't know what it was over, they all went on strike, the whole mill. So they had to go get the personnel manager. They went and got him and he says, "If you people don't go back to work, I'm firing your leader." Meaning me. And they said, "You're gonna what?" and they all rushed him. I was petrified; I thought sure to God, they were gonna kill him. They all raced to the door after him. Boy did he go running! He ran out of that room so fast, and then, of course, a whole kit and caboodle stopped him down. And of course they all got their raises. (About) The ones that didn't want to join, Louis said, "Talk 'em into it or fire them" "No Louis" I says, "I'm not gonna talk 'em into it. If they don't want to join, they don't want to join. This isn't a closed shop or anything. They're not botherin' anybody," I says, "Leave 'em alone." He says, "Those broads!" I says, "They're not broads, Louie, they're girls, they're young ladies." He says, "Since when. They're old maids." "Nonetheless," I says, "They're girls who have been here a good many years, and I'm not having them lose their jobs over the union," I says. "I admit if they weren't doing their work or something, but we got things we want now, we've got our rights now and everything else. So let it stand at that." That's the way it stood for quite a while. We were all discriminating then because there was a war going on.





**SACRED TEMPLE**  
by Peggy Leedberg

Secluded deep inside the temple  
The golden image of Sappho stands  
Dedicated to words of eternal rhyme.  
She lived secure without the wall  
Ruled by common words, not heroic time.  
Lovers' lyrics that need no score  
Were writ by her, then transposed,  
Forever, to stone. Mankind has viewed  
Her words, her Island, as testament  
That woman's love is corrupt and lewd.

No sound has passed that temple  
Wall. Solidly sacred in silence  
It stands unmoved by restless wind.  
The wall encircles to protect  
To keep all thoughts close within.  
Scores of images lie round the wall  
Left to waste by unlicensed word.  
Tormented by swirling powers of greed  
They meant to gather fruit in  
Without any desire to bring forth seed.

The temple wall is tall and strong,  
The embodiment of restraint.  
But bright eyes suggest a passage,  
Under the wall, to beyond the Pale,  
Lit by the greying glow of age.  
Knowledge on vines clings close  
Knowing that words thought are safe.  
Thoughts voiced have cracked the wall  
Only silence insures survival  
Witness Lilith. She the first to fall.

Wail the dirge for fallen heroes.  
Tell tales of wondrous deeds,  
Sing praise to the great warrior.  
Their fate sealed the temple wall  
Our silence continues the barrier.  
Safe inside, thoughts have rested  
Untroubled by tarnished monuments.  
Within the wall, through the dark  
The eyes of Emily sparkle light;  
Daringly, she sings out to the lark.





### THE WEDDING SHEET by Sandra Cofran

My mother made me a gift,  
A wedding sheet  
Starchy bright with scalloped edges,  
Embroidered white on white  
For "Someday."  
I took it from her work-worn hands  
And thought of all her years...  
Tears...  
Years of struggling...  
    to do what she did not want to do  
    to do what she really needed to do  
Scurrying quietly through her own life  
Tip-toeing so as not to disturb.  
So, I took it home  
And put it on my single bed  
Starchy white with scalloped edges  
Embroidered white on white  
For "NOW" ... For "NEVER."

### SPRING SEARCH by Eva Apfelbaum

Spring is here  
Middle-aged I stand  
A strong-stemmed tree  
With branches and branchlets  
Intertwining too profusely.

Fuller crowned am I,  
Less flexible,  
More crimped, more brittle,  
From the drum-beat pressure  
Of the rising sap  
I sometimes crack.

In the depth  
Of humus and rock  
My roots paw and creep  
Spread and seek  
Richer elements to stir  
This tree,  
Into the vital elan of Spring.



## ONE WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE

I am the daughter of lower middle class Irish immigrant parents. Looking back over my life as a teenager and young woman, it is clear to me today how women are male-defined, beginning at birth. The socialization of the young female child is dictated by male definitions of what it is to be female. I grew up with a poor self image and a hazy identity. I was socialized to accept the female roles. When I questioned the unequal treatment of women, other women tried to convince me that I was selfish and ego-centered. They would explain to me what men had a right to expect (even though our own rights were ignored).

When rebellion as a teenager got me nothing but disapproval, I gave in to my socially accepted roles. By the time I graduated from high school, I planned to work in some meaningless clerical job until the "right man" came along. My parents did not value intelligence. They certainly did not believe in a college education for women. To rise above them would threaten their patriarchal position and authority. I did not believe in myself enough to go against them and face their wrath.

I took a job bookkeeping for a jobber in my hometown. The boss offered me the same starting salary as file clerks at the large insurance companies in Boston. But for this I was expected to work a half day on Saturday, or until the books were finished. The boss gave me a well-rehearsed speech about the train fare and commuting time he was saving me. He also pointed out there were many "girls" who would jump at the chance to work so close to home. I was not anxious to go to Boston and file all day, so I took the job. He paid straight

salary to avoid paying for overtime and sick days. If out sick, I was subjected to indirect remarks about people getting paid for taking time off to go shopping. Sometimes the boss did not speak for several days, or slammed around the office giving me hostile looks. The value of the work I did was minimized. I was made to feel like a servant.

Two older men who stocked the shelves and delivered orders to neighborhood grocers, and the billing clerk, were all paid considerably more than I was. When I mentioned this to my boss, I was told that their work was harder and that men have families to support. Yet one stock clerk was a bachelor who boarded with his sister and her husband; the other did not have children, and his wife worked full time. The billing clerk was a young man who lived with his parents. However, he also did inventory and could help stock shelves when needed. I suggested that I could do those jobs, too, but was told the company did not want to expose women to injury and rough language. I accepted such excuses since I recognized that no one thought my job was important, and I was the easiest to replace.

Besides washing my desk weekly, I had to clean the ladies' room (otherwise I could not have brought myself to use it). The washrooms were a filthy, makeshift corner of the building, walled off and separated by plaster board. When truck drivers came to deliver goods, they would take one look at the men's room, and use the women's room instead. I complained that I should not have to clean up after them. I got the message that they, too, were more important than I was.

When I was at this job almost three years, I was summoned to court as a witness against my boss. He had taken out an insurance policy on his wife as if she were an employee, after learning she had terminal cancer and could no longer work. When he claimed benefits after her death, the insurance company refused to pay and countersued. The insurance company reasoned that if its claim were correct, I would never have seen his wife at the office. I had not, and so testified. My boss was livid, not only over my testifying, but because I got paid for the day I spent in court. He tried in every devious way to get me to quit. However, since we had a verbal agreement that I would receive two weeks' vacation pay after three years of service, I tried to stick it out for the rest of that year. When I finally gave notice and asked for my vacation pay, he told me that he didn't owe me anything, not even a reference.

I then tried a large industrial corporation. Through the impersonal personnel office, I was placed in one of the job slots chronically needing to be filled. I later found out that there was a long list of such jobs, the worst paid, low in status, and primarily filled by women. I was one of the anonymous clerks who had to be capable of outstanding performance to be promoted to even a slightly higher status "female" job.

I quit after six weeks, taking another bookkeeping job, closer to home. While there was little job satisfaction, my new employer paid better than most and treated the women employees like "ladies." In return for listening to his problems and running and fetching for him, we were given long casual coffee breaks, free doughnuts, a Christmas bonus, and gifts he gathered in Europe, as perfume from Paris, gloves from Italy. While on this job, I got married. My boss asked me to postpone having a family since he wanted me to stay as long as possible. I resented this request, but at the time I did not understand why.

I realize now that I married in an attempt to achieve adult status. I still felt like a child at home, and saw that young women did not receive much respect from anyone in the outside world. I continued to

work until the eighth month of my first pregnancy. At home, I was responsible for the cleaning, cooking, and laundry—for all household duties. I could not keep up with the endless drudgery. I blamed myself for laziness and lack of organization. While I was very resentful that my husband would not help, I thought I had no right to feel that way. Other women accepted the situation and seemed not to need help. But my resentment grew. My husband was supposed to be a person who cared about me. And I was not getting paid here to swallow my resentment.

After my second child was born, I felt trapped and isolated. I was lonely and depressed. Hadn't I been given to accept that the traditional options for women in our society were marriage, madness, or suicide? I began to give careful consideration to the other two options. I eliminated suicide because of my responsibility to my children. I thought to go mad, and then save myself from madness. I tried several kinds of therapy. But the mental health professionals upheld traditional patriarchal values. They sought to make me accept my role, labelling marital problems a woman's problem. They failed to "straighten me out" because I could not accept total responsibility for what was wrong with my marriage, nor could I accept my role of wife and mother. I got an apartment, a job as a postal clerk, and a divorce. My children were three and four.

The job at the post office was traditionally a man's job. The men I worked with were hostile at first, ambivalent at best. They complained about reverse discrimination, as I was seldom asked to pull down the mail sacks, or to load them on the truck. Nor did the ladies' room have a "spy" camera, as the men's room did. Financially I was doing well, but emotionally and physically I could not handle the situation. Since mothers are supposed to stay home and raise their children, there were no reasonable alternatives for child care. As I was in a "man's job," no attempts were made to change hours to suit others eligible for such work, the schedule working actively to keep women out. When my children got chicken pox and the measles my co-workers said I should be fired for taking time off. The only daytime

babysitting arrangement that was reasonable was other young mothers, who cannot take contagious children.

When my co-workers realized I was getting a divorce, they jumped to the conclusion that the reason I, a woman, had elbowed my way into a good-paying male job was to look for a man. They became like birds of prey. Suddenly they all had exactly what I needed to solve my problems. I was offered lost weekends and endless stories of how their wives did not appreciate or understand them. My situation was like a dirty joke to these men, who were oblivious to my pain and difficulties as a divorced mother. They did not offer any constructive solutions to any of my real problems, seeing me only as an opportunity to put a little spice in their own dreary married lives, their wives tucked safely into their accepted roles.

I lasted ten months in this situation, until the time when, in order to keep my job, I was expected to work twelve hours a day, six days a week—to deal with the Christmas rush. I remarried a year after my divorce, choosing the first single guy who came along and seemed interested in my children.

In retrospect, I can see why women marry. We need security because most of us are never given the chance to provide it for ourselves, stuck as we are in dead-end jobs. We need to be protected by a man from men, and a male-dominated society. We need protection from other forms of exploitation, which seem to serve as punishment to single and divorced women for not accepting their assigned roles. It becomes a trade-off, allowing oneself to be exploited by one man to avoid being exploited in a hundred other ways by many. Women may also think that the status of a married woman will bring an end to being treated like a child, or retarded adult. When that doesn't work, a woman will often have a child, since surely one is treated as a responsible adult when one is a mother. But that can work even less well, since many women find they need protection from their own husbands. This was the case with me.

My second marriage was worse than my first. But the side effect of ill-treatment was to my benefit. Because my husband

was so unreasonable, I began to want to have control over my own life. I began to realize how much I was capable of handling.

After three years in this marriage and a third child, I decided to try therapy again. This time I had an intelligent female counselor who, although not a feminist therapist, strongly related to the inequality and injustices in my marriage. Through her loyalty and support, she helped me to grow up.

I divorced again, after six years of marriage. Although the house and property were deeded to me, my lawyer warned me not to try to change the mortgage over to my name. Without my husband's name and the backing of the Veteran's Administration, the bank might well cancel the mortgage. (Laws and attitudes have since begun to change, as women have sought to be recognized as responsible wage-earners. Today I have the mortgage in my own name.)

After the divorce was settled I went to work as a cocktail waitress. Since I still had a pre-school child at home during the day, it was easier to get sitters at night. Waitressing is also one of the few jobs at which unskilled women can earn good money, again reflecting society's view of what women are valued for.

A year later, needing a new stove, I went to a large national chain and tried to establish credit on my own. The store would not extend credit to me on my income, and asked if I had children and if I received child support. The company wanted to know how much support, my lawyers' names, where my divorces were obtained, how payments were made, who could verify these amounts and if they were paid regularly. After poking and prying and checking to see if I was telling the truth, the store told me it did not consider child support as income when extending credit! I could buy the stove if I paid half the price as down payment. Before laws were passed to prevent discrimination against women in obtaining credit, single and divorced women were systematically punished for not accepting a married role. The married woman, although she, too, could not get credit on her own, was "rewarded" by being able to use her



husband's credit to buy.

The economic bind has continued for me, as costs have risen faster than my income, and I have struggled to earn a college degree. The punishment for my unmarried status somehow doesn't let up. For the past six years, I and my three children have been living below the poverty level. But I am not eligible for financial aid because I am a homeowner. The legal system is unresponsive to divorced mothers as well, doing little to hold fathers responsible for supporting their children. Nor is a welfare mother allowed to earn money to pay for her own training and education—in order to get out of the welfare system. I have spent all my savings

and owe \$5,000 in educational loans, trying to keep my home and family together.

Yet the struggle makes me stronger and stronger. Next year after I graduate I will be working full-time, although my earning potential is only about \$8,000. Two of my children will be graduated from high school—the first is in college. I look forward to the day when I will no longer be a dependent of the system. I will be free to join with other women to help find ways to change a structure that does not allow full rights to women as human beings because it refuses to see women as fully human.

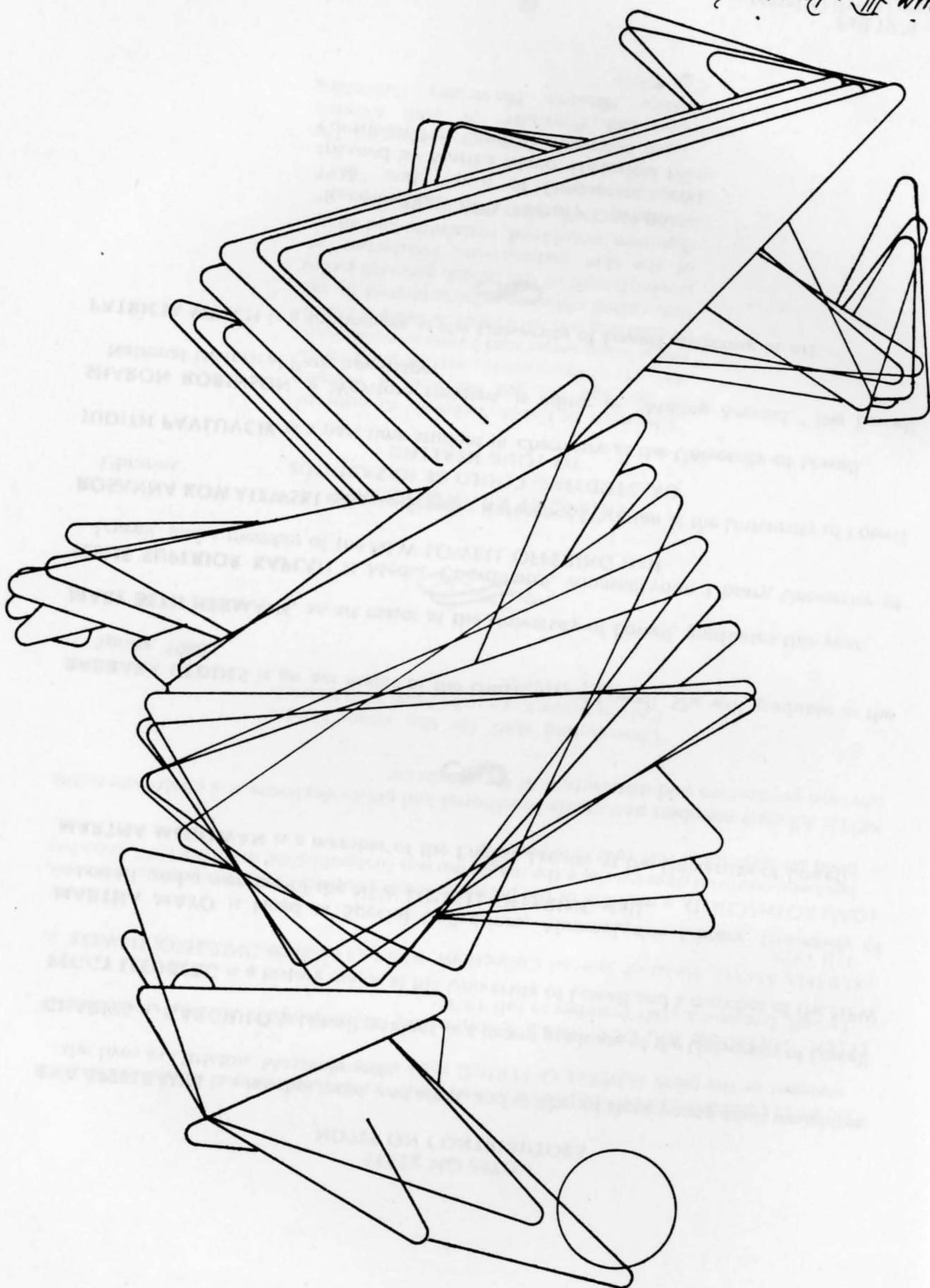
[The author was recently graduated from the University of Lowell.—Ed.]

### **WORDS** by Eva Apfelbaum

She spoke  
Her words forming  
A wrinkled ribbon,  
Tapering on and on  
Wrapping nothing,  
Gathering emptiness.  
Her colorless, confusing wordiness  
Unraveled,  
Venting disconnections  
To the wind.

Shawnee Indians

White gun & Runaway



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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"Recollections of a Factory Operative—1938" and "Spirit of Discontent" contributed by Martha Mayo. Historical filler contributed by Sandra Cofran.

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LESLIE SUPERIOR KAPLAN, Media Coordinator, Alumni/Lydon Library, University of Lowell, became a staff member in fall 1978.

MARTHA MAYO, Head of Special Collections, Alumni/Lydon Library, joined the staff in fall 1978.

JOAN ROTHSCHILD, a member of the political science faculty of the University of Lowell, has been editorial director since the magazine was first published in spring 1977. Joan has been on sabbatical this year, 1979-80.

NOTE: All staff members participate in editorial and policy decisions and contribute to the physical production and distribution of the magazine.

Contributing staff for this issue: Sandra Cofran, Susan Koczarski, Ellen Makarewicz, and Judy Stevens.



### EATING UP KNOWLEDGE????? OR, STUDYING COULD BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH!!

"Chlorosis or Green Sickness: At puberty, or the age the girl becomes a woman, delicate or excessively nervous children, or those living under bad hygienic conditions, or *studying too hard*, may develop a condition called chlorosis, characterized by impoverishment of the blood, greenish pallor of the skin, palpitations, headaches, indigestion, nosebleed, irritability and an *appetite for chalk, slate pencils, etc.*"

[Emphasis added.]

...from Women's Diseases Section of *The Household Physician: A 20th Century Medica*, (Boston: Physicians Publishing Co., 1905).



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